

## About Basetrack Live

*Basetrack Live* is an ambitious collaboration between award-winning theatre company En Garde Arts and corpsmen from 1st Battalion/8th Marines. Using images from independent photojournalists embedded with US Marines in Afghanistan, and a script drawn from genuine social media exchanges and interviews, *Basetrack Live* immerses audiences in the experiences of military service personnel and their families.

This multimedia work of theater combines stunning images and video footage, filmed interviews, live actors, and an original score performed by an on-stage band to tell a dynamic story of ordinary people fundamentally changed by the extraordinary experience of fighting a war.

In the last decade, more than 2.2 million US veterans have returned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite wide-spread support for veterans, many of today's returning service men and women and their families struggle with readjustment. Resuming their civilian lives, reconnecting with family, finding work, or returning to school can present ongoing challenges.

Less than 1% of the population shares the experience of serving in the military—an experience that can be unimaginable for many civilians. Even well-regarded representations of the war in popular culture, such as Oscar-winner *The Hurt Locker*, can reinforce fictional stereotypes that don't reflect the actual experience of many veterans.

*Basetrack Live* is not about political posturing or making any arguments about war. In giving voice to the story of these Marines and their families, it aims to connect both veteran and civilian audiences, helping Americans understand what is asked of our servicemen and women.



### Dig Deeper

#### *Further Reading, Interesting Links, Ways to Get Involved*

- Visit the [Basetrack Live](#) website to find out more about the show and its creative team
- [FAST COMPANY Online Magazine](#): “Journalism, social media, and art fuse to tell a powerful war story.”
- [Covering Marines at War, Through Facebook](#), a New York Times interview with photojournalist and One Eight Basetrack website creator, Teru Kuwayama
- Learn about America's military mail at The Smithsonian National Postal Museum's online exhibit [Mail Call](#)
- Read stories of service and join the conversation by answering the question “[How do you serve?](#)”
- Post a response card on the interactive conversation wall at [Peace & Quiet](#), a temporary installation in front of Royce Hall.

## **THE BIGGER PICTURE: Adaptations and Connections**

*Basetrack Live* is based on the website One Eight Basetrack, which featured photographs and videos by Teru Kuwayama and fellow photojournalists Balazs Gardi and Tivadar Domaniczky. How did wartime photographs become a multimedia theater piece? It's a long journey that begins with a small but important change in military policy.

In 2010, the military lifted its ban on social media. Soldiers and journalists in war zones were able, for the first time, to post tweets, Facebook messages and Instagram photos from the front lines. With these new tools available, Teru Kuwayama wanted to experiment with new methods of reporting on the war while he and his team were embedded with The First Battalion, Eighth Marines Regiment. Using only iPhones and the Hipstamatic app, the journalists and the Marines themselves documented their experiences on deployment in Afghanistan.

Kuwayama and his team launched a website and a Facebook page to share these photos. It quickly became clear that while the photos were recording history, they were also enabling military families to keep in contact with their loved ones in a way that wasn't possible before. "We create a pipeline between 1,000 Marines working in very austere, isolated conditions in southern Afghanistan and connect them to their mothers, their fathers, their wives, their girlfriends, their husbands and their kids" Kuwayama said about the project. Soon, those families started influencing the content of the sites, posting their own photos of their Marines and sharing their homefront experiences. What started as an experiment in new media and citizen journalism had become a tool for connection and community.

Through the images, comments, and conversations chronicled on these sites, a story began to emerge—a story of ordinary families and how they were changed by the extraordinary demands of war.

Later that year, Ed Bilous, founder of Julliard's Center for Innovation in the Arts, went to a gallery exhibition of the Basetrack photos, and was inspired by the dramatic images and the personal stories they represented. He began to conceive a performance at the intersection of theatre, music, photography and social media. He and composer Michelle DiBucci developed a short workshop piece, which eventually grew, with the support of En Garde Arts and a dedicated creative team, into a full-length theatrical experience.

The creative team of *Basetrack Live* felt the story would not be complete without including the experience of these Marines as they return to their civilian lives. In addition to the photos and videos captured overseas, the team conducted hours of interviews with the Marines and their families back at home. The content of these interviews—over 500 pages of transcribed conversations—was adapted to become the production's dialog.

Even the music, written by Michelle DiBucci, reflects the experiences of these troops. "The challenge in creating the score has been trying to incorporate styles meaningful to the marines, and create a good soundscape for the show," DiBucci said. "Some parts actually use recordings from the battlefield." Every element in *Basetrack Live* attempts to stay true to the emotional realities of military service.

Those emotional realities have been captured and represented in an array of formats since those first iPhone pictures snapped on an Afghan battlefield. Each new version added a new perspective, a new layer of voices and responses, a new way to connect, but each iteration had the same goal: to set aside sensationalism and politics and make the huge, impersonal concept of war knowable on a personal level.

**Basetrack was designed as a work of journalism, but I think the methods can be brought to a wider audience and a deeper level of meaning can be drawn from it, if it's reorganized as a work of art.**

*-Ed Bilous*  
Basetrack Live Creator

### **DISCUSSION TOPICS**

Does communicating with a loved one online feel different than being with them in person? How?

Do you think online communities or groups can create real and meaningful connections? Why or why not?

Adaptations can be used to tell a compelling story in more accessible ways. Most famously, books are often adapted into movies. Can you think of some other examples?

What do you think is the most challenging part of adapting a story out of one format and into another?

Has social media influenced the way you get information or the way you think about the news?

What do you think citizen journalism is? How is it different from professional journalism?

Should everyone be able to 'report' on their experiences? Why or why not?

**You constantly hear these lamentations about the death of journalism. It doesn't look like that to me. It looks like the birth of journalism. Just because you didn't study journalism, [that] doesn't disqualify you as a genuine voice.**

*-Teru Kuwayama*

## **INTERVIEW WITH TYLER LA MARR**

Actor Tyler La Marr plays Marine AJ Czubai in *Basetrack Live*. Tyler was a Sergeant in the Marine Corps until 2010 and has served two tours in Iraq. Tyler was born in Washington State and spent most of his life there until he joined the Marines after high school. He began pursuing his acting career in 2009 while still in the Marines by taking classes and acting in multiple independent films in the Maryland area. After finishing his contract in the Corps he headed to New York City for some formal training and earned his BA in Theater Performance from Marymount Manhattan College. He is also the co-founder of the Society of Artistic Veterans based in NYC. We asked him about his work on the play, and how his military experience informs his art.

### **What were your first feelings about being involved with *Basetrack Live*? Have they changed?**

The first draft of the script was great for what it was, a collaboration of stories from one particular Marine and his ex-wife. It has since been shaped into this inside look at the humanity of war through the first-hand accounts of veterans and their families. I feel it's truly become a show that accurately portrays the message of these Marines and their families, using theater as a vehicle to do so.

It's been a very interesting experience for me personally because I have had the opportunity to see how passionately people have connected with this show. We have had multiple people in our talkbacks after performances express their gratitude for balancing the story equally between the veteran's experience and the family's experience.

### **Your character, and all of the dialogue, is based on actual experiences shared through the *Basetrack* online community and in interviews. As an actor, did that change how you approached the role?**

This is the first verbatim (interview-based) play I've worked on as an actor. It has been an adjustment. With a fictional character there is a process to giving life to said character, reading through the play many times, and mining every bit of information you can to figure out who that person is.

With *Basetrack*, the text is literally straight from a real person who is still alive today, which is an entirely different ballgame. It's not like playing a dead president who will never see your work. The Marine I'm playing is real, he is around my age, and we even have the same birthday! As an actor I started with what I knew: Read everything. I asked for every interview transcript with AJ. I took every piece of evidence from these interviews. Then, I added in pieces of my own experience. The character of AJ and the real Marine AJ are obviously two different people, but I hope to tell this story through the character I've "created" while still honoring AJ himself.

### **Can you tell us about the rehearsal process? How did the script change during the process?**

The rehearsal process has been an adventure, along with the evolution of the script. I didn't receive the first draft of what the show is now until a few weeks after I was officially cast. We began with read-throughs of just the text itself. As the audio & video montages progressed, we slowly began adding those into our rehearsals. Our director wanted to make sure we lived completely in the world of the play, with all the elements that were going to be present with us on stage. Some of the funniest moments of those early rehearsals were when he would try to show us how a certain audio track sounded if the musicians at Juilliard were still working on it. It was like trying to hum the remix of a song to someone who's only heard the original once.

It's hard working on a show where the script is ever-changing but it's amazing at the same time. I just received the latest draft of the script in late August. We learned a lot from our preview/workshops and took the feedback to heart. With any other play where the script is in development, the writer makes changes and the actors simply roll with the punches. With *Basetrack* it's much more collaborative because we all have the same information to pull from. We can figure out which stories or snippets of text from the interviews will help progress the narrative of the show as a team.

**You pursued your acting career after 6 years of serving in the Marine Corps. Can you tell us more about that transition, and the links between these two arenas that seem so disconnected?**

I actually started my acting career while I was still active duty in the Marine Corps. I was stationed in Maryland at the time, about a year away from the end of my contract. That's when you start deciding whether or not you'll reenlist. I had an amazing job in the Corps and felt like I truly made a difference in the world but I had to ask myself, what do I want to do for the rest of my life? Ever since I was a kid I've always become immersed in a good story. Whether it's television, film, or theater, everything else just falls away and I get lost in that world. This joy became an escape for me while I was deployed and the world around me didn't make sense. I knew I wanted to be a part of that process and the magic that has been such a big part of my own life.

So, I started taking classes in Baltimore and doing small projects in the area. My plan was to go to LA after leaving the Marines. Luckily, a friend of mine had a cousin in the business and asked if she had any advice for me. It turned out his cousin is not only in the business but is well known for her work on TV and in movies. I didn't think I would hear anything, but she sent an email explaining the ins and outs of the business and recommended I go to New York to get some formal training and build my resume. That was about four years ago. I recently wrote her again, to tell her about this tour and thank her for helping me as an artist just starting out.

In my opinion the arts and the military are two ends of a very long spectrum. At one end you have the arts, which are completely subjective, limitless, and freeing. At the other end you have the military, which is set in its traditions. It's rigid, disciplined, and heroic. Some have argued that the two have nothing in common. I disagree whole-heartedly.

When someone asks me what's OK to say to a veteran, I tell them to ask three things: what branch were they in, what was their job, and where did they serve. That particular person will share as much as they are comfortable with. Most of the time you'll get a whole lot more than you expect. Veterans are storytellers. Whether we were sitting in a swamp in North Carolina or sweltering in the heat in Fallujah, we always had to find ways to entertain ourselves. Someone was always telling a story. The arts are all about storytelling and spreading a message through performance.

What I've found in the arts is an outlet for my own stories, and the ability to tell the stories others have to share. The military gave me the discipline and determination to achieve the goals I've set out for myself, and the opportunity to acquire the education necessary to do so. Veterans have a large stigma attached to them after returning from combat due to the brutal nature of war—and yes, this is a very large issue in the veteran community. However, there are those of us who were lucky enough to come out the other side in one piece looking forward to the next adventure in our lives.

# DESIGN FOR SHARING

K-12 ARTS EDUCATION

## PREPARE FOR YOUR VISIT TO UCLA

- Please bring the attached Directions for Bus Drivers with you in case your driver does not have proper directions.
- Design for Sharing volunteers will meet your bus and direct you to the theater; please be ready to leave the bus when directed to do so.
- Count your students and teachers before you arrive; the ushers will need to know how many people you have before they can seat you.
- Adequate adult supervision is important to the success of these events. Chaperones may need to supervise students in restrooms and be alert when students are entering or leaving the auditorium. Adults are expected to sit with students and help maintain appropriate standards of behavior.
- The hall is opened for seating one-half hour before the performance is scheduled to begin. We make every effort to begin on time, but occasionally the opening is delayed five to ten minutes due to late arrivals from other schools or technical problems.
- Restrooms are located to your left as you enter the theater. Have your students use the restrooms before the performance begins.
- **Flash photography is not allowed in the theater**, as it can be dangerous for the performers - the flash may temporarily blind them causing an accident. Use of any flash camera, laser pointer or recording device whatsoever may be cause for ejection from the hall.
- Remind your students that chewing gum, loud talking and running are inappropriate in the theater, even before and after the actual performance.
- Please do not allow students to bring lunches or snacks to their seats. Lunches can be stored in the lobby during the performance.
- Please remain seated when the performance is over. Schools will be dismissed a few at a time.
- Self-guided tour information and campus maps are available in the lobby. We hope you'll make the most of your visit to UCLA and explore the campus. If you don't have time to cover it all, take a stroll through the sculpture garden or pop into Powell Library's historic rotunda.

